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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRASILIA 001549

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SUBJECT: BRAZIL: LULA ENVOY AND AMBASSADOR DISCUSS BOLIVIA  
CRISIS

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN DANILOVICH. REASONS: 1.4 (B)(D)

1. (C) Introduction: Ambassador and PolCounselor met on 8 June at the residence for a private lunch with President Lula da Silva's Foreign Affairs Advisor, Marco Aurelio Garcia and his deputy, Marcel Biato. Garcia has traveled repeatedly as Lula's "fireman" to Venezuela (he speaks by phone and meets frequently with Hugo Chavez), Haiti (where he spent a week in October 2004 assessing security, political and assistance issues) and Bolivia (where he was dispatched by Lula last week for meetings with President Mesa, MAS leader Evo Morales, church and social sector representatives and U.S. Embassy Charge.) Septel will focus on the discussion regarding Haiti; details of the Bolivia discussion follow below.

2.(C) Garcia returned from Bolivia at the end of last week and has been monitoring the situation closely since then. He expects major developments in the next 24-48 hours. Garcia said that both he and FM Amorim (who returned early from the OAS GA because of Bolivia) are on stand-by for travel to Bolivia on short notice, but Garcia opined that he thought it would be best if he goes instead of Amorim (Comment: Garcia's reasoning was not explained, but we assumed he thought Amorim's presence would raise the signature of Brazilian involvement higher than the GOB believes to be opportune. Amorim called Garcia on his cell phone during the meeting with Ambassador and the two conferred on Bolivia developments. End comment.) Garcia made these observations on the current situation:

-- The GOB believes the best succession scenario in the current conditions would be by-passing Senate President Vaca Diez and Chamber of Deputies President Mario Cossio, who are deeply unpopular with protesting sectors, and passing executive authority after their resignations to the chief Supreme Court justice until new elections are held. This is constitutional and provides "breathing room" in which Morales and others may be persuaded to demobilize protests in the immediate term.

-- A worst case scenario, in Garcia's view and based on his meetings last week, would be assumption of authority by Vaca Diez. Garcia said the GOB fears a large-scale, violent revolt in such a case, with protestors occupying areas around government buildings in an effort to bar Diez's installation as acting president. The potential for a blood bath in such circumstances deeply concerns the Brazilians, Garcia said.

-- Another scenario for defusing tensions would be a decision to nationalize the gas sector immediately by whomever is acting as president, Garcia said. He noted that such a decision would involve complex arbitration in its aftermath and would be "reversible at most any time," hence there could be some merit in using this tactic to provide immediate stabilization in the country. (Comment: Garcia must understand this would be an extreme option, but he appeared to believe the circumstances are sufficiently grave that unorthodox tactics are required. End comment.)

-- Asked about the possibility of a victory by Morales if elections are called, Garcia replied that the GOB doubts Morales could win, and Morales must be aware of this reality. Garcia opined that Morales has "radicalized" in some positions, but that he also must be aware that such extreme positions do not constitute "an agenda for governance." Garcia also seemed to downplay the influence of Chavez on Morales, but would not be drawn into a detailed discussion, joking only that "Venezuela and the United States are equally distrusted," depending on who one talks to in Bolivia.

-- Garcia praised the role of the church and senior clergy who are politically astute, saying the church now is virtually the only institution in Bolivia with sufficient credibility and good will across the social spectrum to act as a mediator.

-- In terms of mediation, Garcia said that the GOB has not offered itself in any specific role to the Bolivians, but has made clear it would be willing to engage if requested, possibly working with the Argentines. Garcia said that OAS mediation is not likely to be accepted in Bolivia owing to the Chilean nationality of the Secretary General.

-- Garcia said the GOB and Brazilian military are quietly

completing contingency planning for evacuation of Brazilian citizens (mainly from La Paz) in the event of a major collapse.

13. (C) Comment: It is possible Garcia will be on a plane to Bolivia on/around the time this message reaches Washington. The GOB clearly is seized with the unfolding crisis, and Garcia candidly stated to Ambassador that what is happening in Bolivia is a potentially devastating repudiation of Brazil's efforts to present regional economic integration as a basis for enhancing political stability in South America. The efficacy of Brazilian efforts to assist in the crisis in the immediate term remain to be seen, but we believe we should remain engaged with the GOB on its willingness to work with Argentina in some capacity as mediators/guarantors if the different sectors in Bolivia reach a consensus on seeking outside support for a solution to the crisis.